

## A new journal for a systemic practice community

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*Birgitte and Liz:*

*It's late evening. We are sitting on one of many sofas among students, tutors, guests of the spring school but we don't notice them. We are deep in a conversation about how our texts need a home, somewhere to belong, and with an appreciative audience. We don't want to reshape carefully crafted papers out of all recognition just to get published in journals which don't get reflexive writing and are, in any case, rarely read. We are talking about the paradox of writing to enhance practice but only if we write in a manner which does not appeal to practitioners. We need to do something.*

*Now!*

*And then suddenly, we know what to do.*

*Gail:*

*It's late in the evening on day two of the spring school. Some enthusiastic participants ask me where they can read more about the work being presented. I don't have an answer. This vital process research from within systemic practice is not going to get published easily given the trend of professional journals to focus in the main on outcome research and decontextualised writing. I go to look for a coffee.*

*Out the corner of my eye, I see two people walking in a purposeful manner towards me. It's Liz and Birgitte.*

*"We have a proposal," says one and she continues, "We need to start our own journal."*

*"Look at the rich practice learning people are presenting and writing about. Where is this important systemic practice research going to get published?" asks the other.*

Two years later, *Murmurations: Journal of Transformative Systemic Practice* has materialised. We know we are riding a wave that is ready to break. Important systemic journals have in recent years fallen back into re-enforcing modernist notions of what counts as knowledge, privileging prescribed method-led practice and positivist research. The development of the profession has been neglected in recent years through an absence of papers which study the intricate detail of what goes on in practice.

This journal is breaking new ground. *Murmurations: Journal of Transformative Systemic Practice* welcomes contributions from systemic and relationally attuned practitioners who want to share and explore relational practice from within the doing of those activities. We want reflexive practitioners to feel entertained and enthused by professional journals; for professionals to be inspired and recognise how we can contribute to the furthering of the profession with our own stories from a range of contexts. This is an inter- and trans-disciplinary journal. As professionals concerned with living systems, we have much to learn about relational know-how from across the fields of education, therapy, organisation, leadership, community work, social and health care.

*Murmurations: Journal of Transformative Systemic Practice* is a site for resistance and resilience. We need to create opportunities for learning from the conversations in our everyday practice and with our dialogical partners. We need an invitation for experimental writing, new thoughts, old ideas reframed or resituated, for making connections with theory and practice from outside of our home ground. Perhaps we need to remember that our professions were built on stories from practice, on first-person ethnographies and understanding practice as a form of action research. We have always experimented to suit the context.

Ethical practice must take context into account. Context can be many things: culture (regional, team, family, professional, for example), power relations, language practices, socioeconomic differences, to name a few. The social constructionist critique of modernism has helped us acknowledge that there is no single formula to perfect improvement or change. We are always working in unpredictable contexts with surges of chaos. This is our everyday working environment. We are experts in balance and stumbling. We work to keep people safe, ourselves too, while experiencing turbulence and living with risk. Our primary skill is etiquette and our primary care is to develop and exercise relational sensibilities which are fair to those present and not present. This is not easy to describe or understand.

Nothing shows relational know-how in action better than a murmuration - a flock of birds swooping in silhouette against an evening sky. These flocks move fast and turn together, up, down, away, towards; ballooning now, flattening, changing shape through every second. At full speed, they skirt the edges of land and sky. A satellite group peels off for a while until they merge again, becoming one great chattering whole. Such coordination at speed! How do they not crash into each other? Such navigation! Who is leading and how do they negotiate followers and the changes in roles? These matters of control and local know-how come up in many of the papers. Julia Jude connects ideas from New Materialism with Endarkened Feminisms, African Oral Traditions and Indigenous Knowing. Alfredo Gaitàn shares experience of learning to quant on a sailing boat with others, with the fabric of the

boat and the weather, while connecting to supervising systemic research. Liz Day slips, falls and rises, drawing a rich portraiture through art, personal and family stories against a familiar landscape of The Graig. Birgitte Pedersen takes us to the edge of time with entertaining stories and astute reflections about how we organise time and let it organise our ways of seeing and being in the world.

Standing back, watching these shape-shifting masses rotating across the sky, we can also wonder what happens in the space between these birds, and in the slipstream? Do they know or plan what to do with each other in advance of making a move? This question runs through several of the papers in this issue. Joanna Michopoulou shows what she has learned about systemic practice through the relational activity of boxing. The paper by Gail Simon, Lisen Kebbe, Ann-Margreth Olsson and Anne Hedvig Vedeler explores the tensions of negotiating, preparing and planning in public space as well as in professional practice.

The systemic professions have become preoccupied by their work with demarcated systems, mainly human, usually local. We often notice an apparently single system as if isolatable, yet small and immediate systems occur in wider systems, visible or invisible to us. These may be political, economic, cultural, social, historical. They will inevitably be part of and in relation to other material systems. For example, birds in a murmuration move with, through and despite weather fronts, air currents, and generate invisible slipstreams. This wind is part of another dynamic stability out of sight of the everyday watcher, yet affecting in time and matter what we or others experience, mostly without us acknowledging that there is other matter present, changing and being changed. Our interest in how power relations play out often focus on everyday local interactions. However, the trends of advanced capitalism and neoliberal beliefs are influencing how we carry out our everyday practice - especially when being expected to deliver automated, manualised or method-led practices.

As we attempt to show someone else what we see up in the sky, this murmuration or this system-in-view has changed and is changing again and again and again until we give up trying to name it, describe it. We give up the expectation of true reporting. We abandon the hope of using all the possibilities of everyday language and instead turn to poetry and literature because then we may speak from within experience. Instead, we speak from within the living moment of practice. Such tellings show our uncertainty, our extraordinary abilities, the chaos of the experience and the fragments that come into play for us from different quarters.

Writing ceases to be a report for another and instead becomes a tale to be crafted for a listening reader. We have imagined a reflexive reader who comes to their practice with a preoccupation with relational ethics and aesthetics, with an openness about what makes a difference in each unique and unfolding context. Method is understood as something which is made up in the moment of doing with others in the dialogue, to which we have a respectful and irreverent attitude.

The writer or writers show their many selves across the different contexts of their lives. There is no profession without professionals; and there is no professional without rich

experience from both within and outside of their work. The writings in this journal then showcase first-person experience and learning from within the living moment of practice as well as from other parts of their lives. Writers experiment with how to position themselves alongside people and avoid aboutness positioning.

The papers in this journal then attempt dialogical writing. We are speaking with, not at, the reader. We expect and anticipate your responses. Readers, writers, those in our atmosphere, make up this dynamic system swirling, influencing each other in unpredictable ways with unpredictable outcomes.

We are committed to this journal being open access so anyone can see the content, which isn't hidden behind a paywall. *Murmurations: Journal of Transformative Systemic Practice* is part of a world-wide political movement to democratise professional and other academic journals. This disrupts the business model for journal publishing associated with profit-led dissemination of information. It also follows a trend of people looking online for papers and expecting to find material freely available. The ethos of open access is that knowledge arising out of publicly-funded practice and research should be available to all for the public good. Murmurations runs on a Diamond Open Access model so it is completely free for everyone who reads it and free for the contributors who publish in it too. But we need donations and sponsors of issues to support the journal, so please [click here](#) or on the blue button to support this innovation.

Do write to us. Write to the writers of the papers! Submit haiku, papers and other media which you feel show transformative systemic life in this world.

Meanwhile, click here to see a video of a murmuration... (<https://vimeo.com/127345477>)

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